



Podcast #1: Planning Health and Wellness Activities

Welcome, and thanks for tuning in to this Click & Go podcast series on how Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) Grant Programs can partner with the school day on health and wellness! This is Julie, and I'm a member of the U.S. Department of Education's You for Youth (Y4Y) Technical Assistance team. In this first podcast, we'll cover the importance of (1) examining your views on health and wellness; (2) gathering data and assessing the needs of students, families and the community; (3) evaluating your current program offerings; and (4) planning for program improvements.

The current understanding of health and wellness, and especially the new emphasis on emotional well-being, might differ from what you were told when you were growing up. It might also differ from the way your students' families think about health. Personal experiences, early teachings and cultural influences affect each person's ideas, beliefs and decisions about what it means to be healthy, and how to achieve health.

Let's take a minute to reflect on our own ideas. When you think of health and wellness, what do you think of first? Physical activities like sports or gym class? Nutrition? Tending to social and emotional needs? Health and wellness covers a range of issues that impact physical, mental and emotional health. The Y4Y **Self-Assessment of Personal Views on Health and Wellness** can help you and your staff reflect on this. Because health and wellness can mean different things to different people, it's important to assess the knowledge and preconceptions of students and families before you launch an initiative.

I learned this lesson the hard way. I once introduced a yoga activity because I thought it would be fun and helpful. In my wellness routine, yoga helps to clear my mind and calm my body. I thought my personal passion for yoga would get my fifth- and sixth-graders excited about learning poses and ways to meditate. Yoga could help the transition from the school day to our 21st CCLC program, and students would learn a valuable, lifelong strategy. What I didn't realize was that some families felt yoga didn't align with their religious beliefs. They believed meditation through prayer was a more appropriate way to achieve a calm mind and body. Other families questioned whether it was the best use of students' time. Because I was gung-ho about starting, and didn't proactively seek stakeholders' input, I had offered programming that was disconnected from the community.

How might I have avoided this? When I first got my brilliant idea to introduce yoga to students, I should have gathered or reviewed data on the beliefs, needs and interests of students and their families. Examining and reflecting on those data could help me decide if my idea was really for my students or for myself, and identify objections that might come from students or families.

To find or collect data, start by using government websites like the Census Bureau or state education departments to get the big picture of trends and demographics in your community. Then use data from the school to identify specific needs of the students and families in your program. Use interest surveys and focus groups to collect student and family voice data. You'll find **elementary and secondary student interest surveys** and **family surveys** in the Y4Y tools section of this Click & Go.



Podcast #1: Planning Health and Wellness Activities

When our team analyzed our data, we noticed self-regulation as a skill where students needed support. Families and school-day partners alike wanted us to build this skill into our program offerings. Because yoga can help with self-regulation, my initial idea was on the right track, but not a good fit for everyone. So the students and another facilitator explored different ways people in our community meditate and exercise, based on personal backgrounds and belief systems, and came up with a menu of choices. Students could pick activities that worked for them and matched family expectations. Some students continued with yoga, some sat silently and meditated or prayed, and we also had a group who asked for more strenuous exercise as a way to relax at the beginning of the program.

In the end, we learned to use data to assess and align all our program offerings with the needs and interests identified in the data. We examined our weekly and semester-long plans, and built a picture of when, where, and how to offer health and wellness activities. Use the **Y4Y Program Self-Assessment of Health and Wellness Offerings** tool for guiding questions to help you plan program offerings.

Let's recap what we've learned so far. We reflected on different views about health and wellness, and what that means for your program. We also talked about the value of data in helping you define and improve what you're doing right and what you plan to do later.

Our data highlighted a need for more physical exercise. We found that some students enjoyed competitive games, like kickball and basketball, but others didn't. So, we planned opportunities for dance, aerobics and martial arts, where the focus is self-improvement rather than competition, since students had expressed interest in all of these. We surveyed families so they could voice any concerns sooner rather than later. The family survey had an unexpected benefit: One parent told us she was a certified aerobics instructor and offered to help. Later she coached students as they choreographed their own aerobics routines! I should mention that the physical activities provided opportunities for students to build stronger bodies *and* helped them build habits of mind — such as persistence and impulse control — that school-day teachers had highlighted as a need.

During data collection, school-day staff told us the district had just rolled out a new social and emotional curriculum. We had a great conversation about the role of social and emotional learning in supporting students' overall health and wellness. As we planned and implemented 21st CCLC program improvements, we made sure to include and complement the school-day initiative. We held daily check-ins and integrated some relationship-building extension activities from the curriculum. We also added moments of mindfulness or meditation and explicit social skills facilitation.

Now is an exciting time in health and wellness programming because knowledge and resources are really expanding. Before you launch an initiative, take time to collect and analyze data so you can match your activities with student needs and interests. In my experience, the more intentional my staff and I became about planning, the more engaged students became. And, no coincidence, we saw improvements in attendance, behavior and achievement. Try it, and see what happens!





Podcast #1: Planning Health and Wellness Activities

Thank you for joining this Y4Y Partnering With the School Day on Health and Wellness podcast on assessing program needs. Listen to the other podcasts for strategies on forming partnerships, designing health and wellness activities, and caring for your staff. Thanks for making Y4Y your professional learning partner. Be well!